

Kenyan media on the spot over slanted coverage

By [Carole Kimutai](#)

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Kenya Union of Journalists and Allied Workers secretary general Eric Orina has accused the media of slanted news coverage and unprofessionalism. In a letter to media owners and editors, Orina called for objectivity from the media rather than subjectivity.

"I take this unprecedented step to urge colleagues in the (Kenyan) media to return to one basic tenet of journalism which they have literally thrown out the door. The basic tenet is; there cannot be a one-sided story. There are two or more sides to any story. In short, if you are going to publish anything about anyone and hope to be respected in the short- and long-term, you better make sure that all sides of the story are heard," he said.

Mobile price wars

His complaint is in reference to the coverage of the mobile price wars between Airtel and Safaricom which have been a subject of media debate and public discussion for the last few weeks.

"One glaring misuse and abuse of the power of the media by those currently in charge is the Safaricom vs. Airtel tariffs saga. It beats logic when the media goes on and on about Airtel's low tariff using the Safaricom angle and completely ignoring or downplaying Airtel. The media has walked in the rain and fetched every remote comment, even from misplaced government and civil society types to vilify the strategy by Airtel that is benefiting consumers at the expense of Safaricom. Why do you want us to continue paying exorbitant rates for a service that is below par? Could it be because Safaricom spends more on advertising than Airtel?"

satire piece sparks storm

On Friday 21 January 2011, a leading journalist Kwamchetsi Makokha wrote a satire opinion piece in the *Daily Nation* arguing that lower calling rates would send Kenya's ailing economy into a coma. In the article, Makokha says; "Cheap calls are bad for people. Besides wasting time that could be spent walking the two kilometres to see if the headmaster has arrived for the school meeting, or checking if there are enough vegetable customers at the market, speaking on the mobile phone at leisure has absolutely no class. People would suddenly have money they should not. Then they would start drifting off towards their usual bad habits like binge eating, alcohol abuse and shopping addiction, among other non-essential activities."

The article raised a major storm and concern. Some members of the online group Kenyan Internet users called Makokha's views elitist.

"I am shocked at Makokha's reasoning in the article. It has an elitist touch in it and personally I see it as an attempt to justify the stranglehold the moneyed class wants to have on the less fortunate masses ie. subject them to a very expensive life so that they can never have money to spare for investment or to spend on other pressing needs. Why walk the 2km and find that the meeting is not going to take place yet you can save your self the time and energy by making a quick phone call? Maybe that time saved can be redirected to tending the shamba (farm)," wrote Wire James.

Biased election coverage

The Kenyan media has often been put on the spot over their coverage of issues and personalities. During the 2007 election, the media was said to be heavily polarised and openly supported political parties and presidential candidates.

"The result of such one-sidedness by the media is that, after the truth eventually outs one of these fine days, such media will end up with so much egg in the face, that the much vaunted 'most trusted institution' tag will be nothing but an empty shell in the Cairo Museum," says Orina.

ABOUT CAROLE KIMUTAI

Carole Kimutai is a writer and editor based in Nairobi, Kenya. She is currently an MA student in New Media at the University of Leicester, UK. Follow her on Twitter at @CaroleKimutai.

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